

AUTHOR OF THE 2020 CHRISTY AWARD BOOK OF THE YEAR

AMANDA
DYKES

ALL THE
L O S T
P L A C E S

A
NOVEL



ALL THE
LOST
PLACES



AMANDA
DYKES



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dykes, Amanda, author.

Title: All the lost places / Amanda Dykes.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2022]

Identifiers: LCCN 2022029125 | ISBN 9780764239502 (paperback) | ISBN 9780764240829 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493439041 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3604.Y495 A79 2022 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20220623

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022029125>

Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Cover design by Kathleen Lynch/Black Kat Design

Cover image by Angela Fanton/Arcangel

Map by Najla Kay

Author is represented by Books & Such Literary Agency.

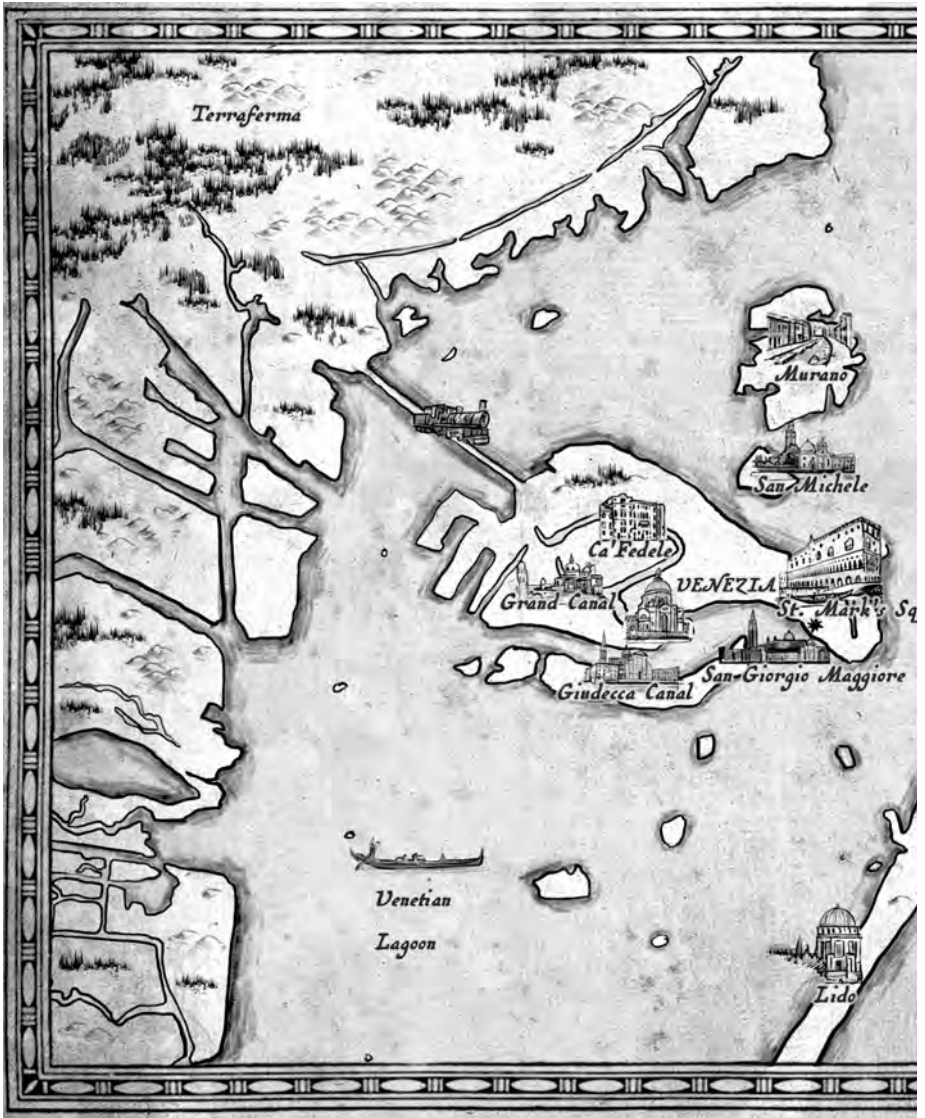
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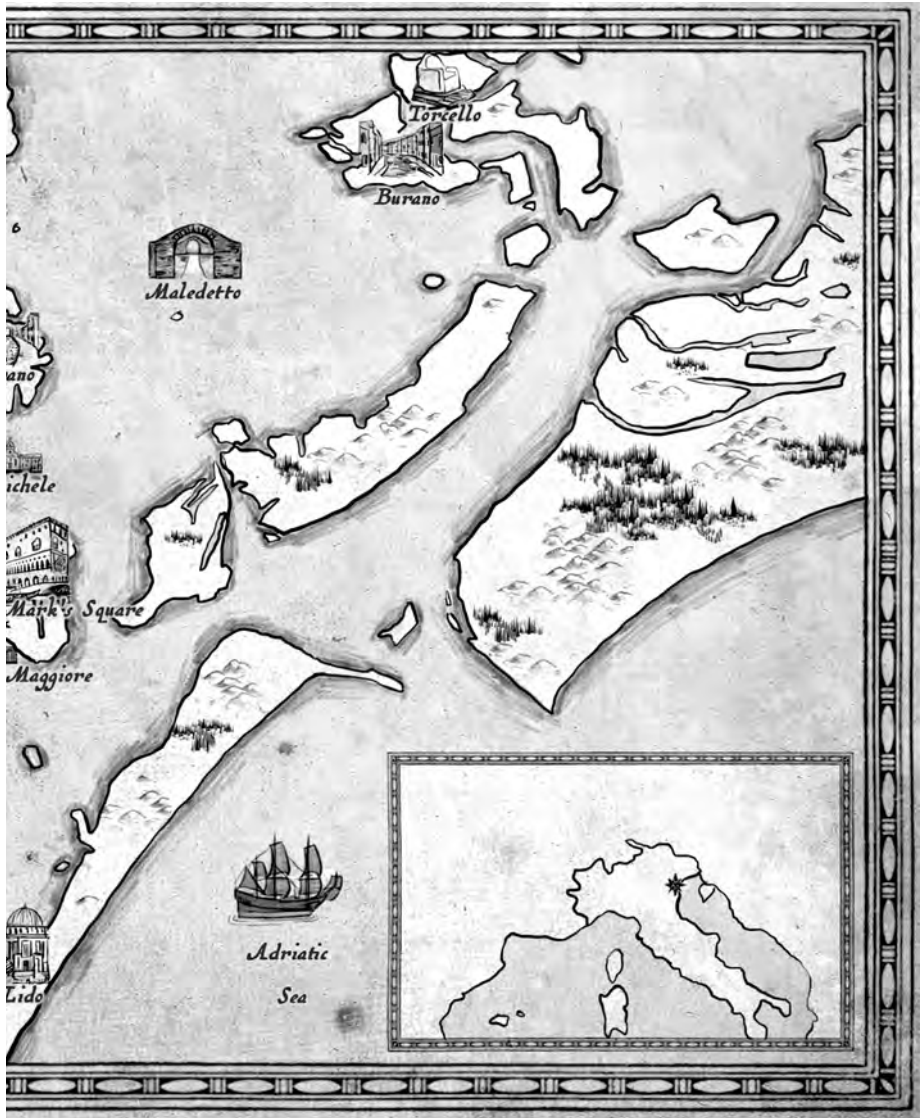
22 23 24 25 26 27 28 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To all who have felt lost,
or faced the question that echoes
within these pages:
“Who am I?”

This tale is for you.

Trouato.





“. . . phantom city, whose untrodden streets
Are rivers, and whose pavements are the shifting
Shadows of the palaces and strips of sky.”

—From “Venice,”
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

“The way to love anything is to realize that it may be lost.”

—G. K. Chesterton

“Courage keep, and hope beget;
The story is not finished yet . . .”

—Dante Cavellini
(as recorded by S. T.)

PROLOGUE

Once upon the dawn of time, there was water. Before there were stars, before the Maker set life into earth, breath into lungs, beast or man to roam . . . there was water. Dark and reaching, stirred not by wind but by the spirit of the Almighty himself.

Once upon the dawn of time, water discovered its eternal dance partners: shadow and light. The trio waltzed, webbing diamonds into depths, scattering stardust over peaked waves, spinning gold over ripples.

These ancient waters have never left. They travel around and around, over and over, time without end. From sea to sky, raining back down into the hands of man.

In the centuries since, these eternity-touched waters bore up tempest-tossed ships. Retreated in shivering obedience to the command *Be still*. Furled and stacked themselves into shimmering walls of parted sea to make way for an impossible escape. Have been struck from rock, sprung from geysers, coursed through rivers, tumbled with abandon over falls . . . carried the fleet of the great explorer Marco Polo to the great beyond and back again to Venezia.

And then, in a time of quiet obscurity, whispered a lullaby in those Venetian canals one night as a babe slumbered, tucked safe inside a tight-woven basket. A tiny boat for a tiny boy, currents

delivering him toward an orphanage beneath the midnight lament of the bells of San Marco.

But just as the basket breached the building's reflection, a north wind tumbled through, pushing him into lantern-glow . . . where a strong pair of hands pulled him, basket and all, into another life.

The waters flowed on as the babe grew into a man who would look out over the lagoon that had delivered him, once upon his dawn of time, into a life that would change the shape of a world. A story covered over until it was all but lost.

Years passed—a century, nearly. A great rumbling skipped over the canals and into every crevice of the aged floating city when that bell tower fell one day. Crumbling, tumbling, crashing to the ground of St. Mark's Square. Pigeons fled, dust billowed, the bells of San Marco fell silent—and along with them, the last vestige of the basket's tale.

Until one night, in that curious marvel of their eternal cycle, those waters descended again. Across the world, on another square, on another man, in another time. Ushering him into the lost tale with every falling drop of rain . . .



DANIEL

SAN FRANCISCO
1904

I only ventured out at night, and all the better if it rained. San Francisco was a place alive—always moving, cable cars clanging, tugboats trumpeting low. Hoofbeats trotted while the occasional motor car chugged through a river of voices tumbling down the city's rises.

But when it rained at night . . . everyone retreated home, and the city became another place entirely. Alive not with the pulse of a crowd but with the splash of water that had been around since nobody-knew-when.

City noises lifted away as droplets descended. I wondered if they exchanged greetings in passing, the noise and water. Perhaps exchanged notes like hospital doctors discussing patients. I wondered, too, if I was descending into madness, imagining such. But imagination came so strange and seldom now, I indulged it.

Excellent ditch made on Lombard Street today, the ascending din might say to the descending rain. Prime locale for a puddle. Best of luck. To which the droplets would oblige, colliding into pavement, leaping into rivulets and sliding, unstoppable, into their new home.

A puddle I now stood beside on the corner of Hyde and Lombard, the rain coming in a wonderful hush. A puddle that now reached up about my feet in small splashes as I took shelter beneath the awning of—ironically—a hat store.

I pulled out my sketchbook, its pages rumpled, vanished droplets leaving puckered paper. My pencil skidded in quick work. This was a good day—two houses in one night.

The first, one of the tall, narrow Victorian row houses up at Alamo Square, had taken longer than expected, requiring extra notes on colors. Thankfully, the brownstone across the street was much simpler.

The ache of my hands from factory work eased as lines joined to climb from the page into a dimensional home. One I would not, this time, forget.

The city knew me best beneath the guise of dark. It was a cosmic joke: the same darkness that once cloaked me in my youth now sheltered me as a grown man . . . but for entirely different reasons. Even so, with each drop of cold rain, my shame eased just a little. As if it were being washed away with the reminder that—though it might take my entire life—I would put things right.

I narrowed my eyes to see better as my pencil scratched away. Square lines here, bay window there—doing their job and facing the bay down below, where Alcatraz stood in dark silhouette. I turned from the isle but felt its presence. Always it was there, always at my back.

“What’s this?” a gruff voice said, and a light blazed straight into my eyes. I held up my hand, trying to see.

Memory clawed—phantom grip of wrists apprehended, head pounding, throat closing.

The light zipped and zagged, pulling me fast out of the memory. No one was apprehending me. I slowed my breath and reached for control.

“Hand it over,” the man said. My hand mechanically extended, offering the sketchbook to the officer, with his rounded helmet and the glint of brass jacket buttons.

“The *bag*,” the voice said, and the flashlight sliced to illuminate

my knapsack. I blinked until the man's figure came into silhouette, bright spots dancing as he bent to retrieve it. The dull grey bag jangled, the sound of coins unmistakable.

Coins I could not afford to lose.

Please, God . . . the prayer sneaking past the grate I'd long ago erected to keep my words from approaching heaven. I'd forfeited any right to that long ago.

He pulled out the few contents one by one, holding them up as silent questions.

First, a dented tin can with no label.

"Dinner," I said.

Second, a paper, torn at the corner.

"Time card," I said. The man held it longer, skeptically. Why, indeed, would I have it with me? "I—was supposed to leave it at the cannery," I said. "Made a mistake." My sentences clipped short when I got nervous. Swallowing, I tried again. "I'll return it at—the first opportunity." A phrase that had become the anthem of my life.

Third, a book. Worn on the blue cover from being so often held and nearly pristine within, for being so little read.

This, he did not inquire after, and I gave silent thanks. I didn't know that I could put words to it.

I swallowed hard, for the final item would determine what became of me.

He pulled it out, turning it in his palm. The blue glass jar, chipped at the rim but screwed shut all the same, caught a drop of rain, then another. As he turned it, its contents rolled richly. A deceptive richness.

"And this?" His voice, all suspicion.

"My wages," I said. There was more to the story—why in a jar, why here now—but this he didn't need to know.

He opened the jar and deposited its contents into his gloved hand, counting. "Three . . . and sixty-five," he said. He studied the three dollar bills and the handful of dull-shining change.

He eyed the brownstone across the street, then my drawing, then the money. "You take this, son?"

“No.” This word quick and sure. Finally, something I could speak with confidence. “Y-you can check the time card.”

He did, and asked how much I was paid by the hour. “By the can,” I said, and told him the amount. “Sardine factory on the other side of the bay.”

“How many did you can this week?”

Sentences grew shorter in my head, and I pressed my eyes closed and concentrated. *Speak normally*. “I . . . soldered three hundred seventy-five,” I said. “A—a penny a can.”

He scratched his head beneath his now-crooked helmet, and the gesture made him seem a bit more friend than foe. “That doesn’t add up,” he said, but he drew back into a curious posture.

“The dinner can,” I said, nodding toward where it lay atop my sack. “They sell the banged-up cans to us cheap.”

“Cheap . . .” I could see him clearly now, the spots having vanished from my rendezvous with the flashlight. His brows pinched, the crease between his eyes like an arrow pointing at the can. “Ten cents?”

“That’s right.”

“For something they paid you one cent to can.”

I shrugged, long ago having come to terms with that particular irony. “They sell them for fifteen cents at the store, sir. It’s still a bargain when you look at it that way.”

He assessed my ragtag possessions and my ragtag self—worn trousers and shirtsleeves rolled up. One suspender had slipped down to my elbow in the flurry of sketching. I hooked my thumb and slid it up slowly.

“And you’re out here to . . . ?” He let the question trail, waiting.

That answer was too long. Too hard. I looked at my sketchbook and just held it up.

“Draw,” the man said.

I nodded.

“In the rain. At night. Fancy yourself an artist?”

“No,” I said, and saw he’d need more of an answer than that. “I just . . . needed to get the lines right.” That was one way of

putting it. The full answer wouldn't make any sense to the man, for so many reasons.

He looked around and puffed out his cheeks, exhaling and shaking his head. "Sorry, son," he said. "A man out in the shadows, studying a house—well, you can understand why I have to check in."

I nodded, words not coming fast enough. I was long out of practice of speaking to people. "Of—of course. I'd have thought the same."

The officer narrowed his eyes, head tilting. "You all right, son?"

Again, a nod. Someday, maybe. Tonight, one step closer.

"Well, don't stay out too long," he said, his voice more paternal and less policeman. "Bound to get cold. January nights aren't too easy on the bones around here. Move along home quick."

"Yes, sir."

He left, the rain easing off a bit as he strode down the hill and disappeared along with his fading whistle.

I set the jar on the ground and retrieved a clutch of various stacked bills from my pocket.

Forty-seven dollars. A fortune. How many months of smelly fish work and numb fingers this represented . . . but it was worth it. I added it to the three in the jar, then counted out the coins again. Carefully creased a corner of my sketchbook paper until it tore easily into a neat square, and etched two familiar words upon it in simple, straight letters.

I'm sorry.

I twisted the jar's lid on, relishing the way the scrape of metal against glass reverberated through my grip. My apology, carved into the night.

I dashed a glance over my shoulder, ensuring I was alone. Slipped across the street, up the front steps—*one, two, three, four, five*—my life was one of counting, always counting—and set the jar carefully on the ground. I lingered only a moment, staring hard, hammering the image of it into my memory, and gave a quick knock before I dashed back into my hiding place across the street.

A man stepped out, his presence and his suit creased into a trifecta of pinstripes, proper things, and perfection. "Hello?"

I clenched my jaw, winced against a rogue stream of water that sneaked down the back of the awning and down my neck. “Look down,” I pleaded, much too low to be heard.

He began to close the door, the golden triangle of light becoming a sliver until it barely grazed the top of the jar—and the man stopped. Paused, and picked it up.

Hot shame constricted my chest. What was I thinking? That an old, chipped jar full of what would be rag money to a man like this would somehow wash me clean? Mean something to him?

“Papa?” A voice came from within, and a little girl appeared, dark hair in long ringlets.

My breath caught. I counted, numbers coming at me quick. Eight years back . . .

It was her. She, a sleeping infant, and me, jumping into the window of what I’d thought was an empty house. Hissing through the dark for my cousin Emilio to go back—but not before he’d gripped golden candlesticks and a porcelain figurine of a hunting dog. For the life of me I couldn’t remember what its color was, only that it had seemed friendly, with its head tilting one way or the other.

“*Put it back,*” I’d whispered. “*It’s a kid’s toy—*” and I remembered the sleepy, shuddering sigh of the babe, how it had shut us up and sent us clambering back out through the window.

We hadn’t been caught. Not that night, anyway. But years later I’d entered the police station after a served sentence and a few weeks on the job at the factory and asked after police reports. I’d learned that the candlesticks—valued at approximately fifty dollars—had indeed been missed . . . as had a toy-sized dog figurine of unknown value, which had been purchased by the baby’s father when he was a boy. For sixty-three cents.

I watched as the man counted the jar’s contents. Fifty dollars and sixty-three cents.

He paused. Studied the money. And grew stiff. “Come inside,” he said to his daughter, gently nudging her shoulder so that she was behind him.

“What’s that, Papa? Can I see?” Her small hand was in the jar before he could stop her, taking out its final object.

“What a sweet puppy!” She clasped her hands around the rough-carved wooden thing, pulling it to her heart and swaying back and forth like it was her own babe.

The man opened his daughter’s palm gently, taking the object up.

He turned it, shook his head, and—to my shock—laughed. A single chuckle, with the bounce of a boy and the depth of time, as if it had vaulted from the shadows of his childhood to revel in the gift of a lost thing found.

“Is it for me?” the girl asked, hope buoyant.

“It is,” he said. “If it is what I think this is . . . then yes. It’s yours.” He looked out into the dark, wary once more, and gently ushered the girl inside before closing the door with creaking finality.

Something eased over me, and I squared the house in my vision for one final look, trying hard to fix it in my mind. The image would not stay, I knew, but I had the sketch, and I could check this one off the list and move on to the next. It would take some time to fill the next jar . . . but time was the one thing I had.